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Facing realities



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Canada. National Selective Service



DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR



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Facing Realities

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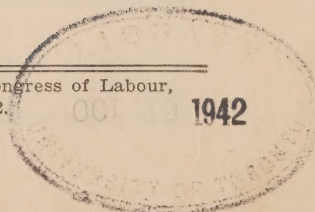
ELLIOTT M. LITTLE

Director, National Selective Service



An address delivered before the Canadian Congress of Labour,
Ottawa, September 15th, 1942.

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FACING REALITIES

by Elliott M. Little

I would like to take this opportunity of discussing with you the new National Selective Service regulations which became effective two weeks ago. These regulations have imposed unprecedented responsibilities on all of us; on the Government, on its special agency Selective Service, on industry and on labour, whether organized or not. All of us must face realistically the responsibilities which these critical times place upon us.

Some of the things I will say today I have said before; but they bear repeating because of the new authority and responsibilities vested in National Selective Service.

The progress of the war must impress upon all of us the need for an honest stocktaking of our position in Canada. The war is now in its fourth year and we haven't even begun to win it. Three years ago the Nazis were testing and perfecting techniques which are now being used at Stalingrad. The enemy began with a tremendous advantage. He has gained a great deal of territory. His production of war materials has increased. He is threatening the shores of this continent.

All our thinking and planning and acting must be in the light of that threat. Without apologizing for the war machine we have created in three years, we must do better. As rapidly as planning will permit, we must use every last bit of agricultural, industrial and military energy and ingenuity.

The prime concern of National Selective Service is with that coordination of effort. There must be a complete balance into which the requirements of the armed forces, agriculture, essential civilian services and war industry are fitted.

As long as manpower was a commodity as plentiful in relation to demand, as most other resources, there may have been no great need for planning. Industry could shop

around for manpower requirements as easily as it could for the metals and fabrics which went into production. It was apparent last winter that the situation had changed and by early spring the actual and planned expansion of both our industrial and military strength had made the manpower shortage acute.

The Job of Selective Service

National Selective Service was established to tackle the problem. The shortage has not yet been solved. It is increasing every day as the war progresses, as our production of war material increases and as our enlistments in and call-up for the armed services swell. While new sources of raw materials or substitutes can often be developed the quantity of manpower in the country is relatively fixed. Because of that, it is the job of Selective Service to view the national manpower situation in its stark realities and to aggressively eliminate wastage and uses of manpower which do not have a direct bearing on the war.

We need almost 200,000 men and women to meet the requirements of industry and the armed forces by the end of this year. And in addition, we need 100,000 men in our logging operations to meet pulpwood requirements and the increased demands for timber placed on Canada to satisfy the needs of ourselves and our Allies.

Our war production is suffering right now because we have not dealt sufficiently ruthlessly with the situation. Our base metal mines producing metals absolutely vital to our munitions production are far from adequately manned. We have an immediate need for thousands of additional men to work on defence projects in vital coastal areas and other strategic points in Canada.

That is the situation with which National Selective Service is attempting to deal. The situation necessitates a complete and fully detailed stocktaking of our national man and womanpower—a stocktaking which must be kept up to date every day of the year. It means planning on the basis of that stocktaking, and one of the first steps in planning is to absolutely eliminate waste in manpower. It is because we must have this day-to-day information on

our people that two weeks ago we issued orders compelling everyone seeking employment to pass through a Selective Service office.

This planning inevitably means a reallocation of much of our manpower, switching over from jobs which we ordinarily consider essential to our way of life, to jobs which are now vital to the very preservation of life itself. It means the wholesale use of women in industry. It means the complete elimination of waste and haphazard use of manpower in all our activities, not excepting essential industry and the armed services. It means that management and workers alike must be fully impressed and satisfied with the significance of their jobs.

If workers sufficiently realize the actual significance of their job, no matter how dull or monotonous it may seem at times, they will stick to their posts all day and every day—stick just as do the boys in Libyan outposts or other defence positions. You don't find them taking a day off when they feel like it or moving to another anti-aircraft battery half a mile down the road because they are tired of the scenery.

Reallocation Needed

We must review the way in which we are using our manpower even in the most essential industries and reallocate our manpower so that it is being used most effectively. Increased efficiency in the use of our men and women is possible in every plant in Canada—and in some of our newer plants to a shocking degree.

With the amazing expansion of industry which has been achieved almost overnight in Canada, some confusion and inefficiency is inevitable. Management has been confronted with a host of new problems unlike any it ever faced before. Its first consideration has been to maintain production schedules. This has been done at the cost of some waste in materials and men. They have maintained those production schedules to a surprising degree but attention must now be given to the elimination of these wastes. The problem is of such magnitude that every employer and every worker must raise his sights as to the contribution each can make.

Management and labour must pool their experience and their ideas in the closest possible way to eliminate the "bugs" from our war production. That is the major reason for our insistence on the establishment of employer-employee committees in all industry. Only by working as a team with good combination play will management and labour be able to meet the demands placed upon Canada's war industry and to permit Canada to make the contribution which she must make. If there is an intelligent appreciation of the problems of management in these new war plants, I am satisfied the worker will be less likely to criticize and more eager to help, even if it means foregoing temporarily some traditional rights and liberties.

If labour takes a perspective view of our wartime industrial development, I believe the attitude of labour will be increasingly constructive and realistic, and that there will be less sniping and hostility between management and labour. My views regarding management responsibility in the same connection I have previously stated in the talk I gave to the Canadian Manufacturers Association in June.

While I am urging a more constructive attitude between management and labour, I must acknowledge that most unions are taking a broad view and are being definitely helpful. The small minority of unions and union leaders, who, despite the dangerous times, are primarily interested in self, is a matter which the unions themselves can take in hand and is a matter with which they are capable of dealing.

Curtailments to Come

In the reallocation of industrial manpower, basic surgical steps will have to be taken in the national interest. We have all been told repeatedly during the last couple of years that our way of life must be changed and our standards of living reduced. We are now at the stage where we no longer have any choice but must forthwith set out to reduce our civilian standard of living to the bare minimum necessary to maintain health and efficiency. From this time on, the nation will see a progressive planned pruning of industries which are not necessary to that minimum standard of life. I don't need to tell you the types of

industry involved, for that is a matter of common sense which makes our course apparent to every thinking citizen.

The curtailment of non-essential industry, which is to conserve both manpower and materials, must of course be done on a systematic and carefully studied basis. The Wartime Prices and Trade Board has just set up a new division whose sole responsibility will be the carrying out of this curtailment. The decision as to what industries will be curtailed will, of course, be a matter of joint consultation between that board, National Selective Service and, where relevant, the Department of Munitions and Supply.

To assist in determining the way in which various industries may be curtailed with a minimum of hardship to their personnel and disruption to their economic structure, we are setting up manpower advisory committees in individual industries. These committees will be composed half of management representatives and half of labour representatives. We believe that the place to seek the most expert advice as to how operations in the newsprint industry may be curtailed, for instance, is to be found within that industry itself. The same principle applies in coal mining, in base metal mining, in the construction industry, in lumbering, in every industry. We have accordingly already set up a committee in the newsprint industry which will advise on how that industry can best handle the 60 per cent of potential production now required of it, so that all required to be engaged in that industry may work a full work week, and those not required may be released to other essential war work.

Industries to Advise

Our production of base metals, especially copper, had fallen off because of the shortage of manpower in those base metal mines. We are setting up a manpower advisory committee in the hardrock mining industry, which includes both base metals and gold. It will be the duty of that committee to recommend a detailed plan under which experienced hardrock miners may be transferred to the base metal mines from the gold mines.

In the coal industry the manpower advisory committee will study methods of correcting the labour shortage

and means of stepping up output, since a maintained and expanded supply of coal is a fundamental factor in our industrial program. At the moment we are not even maintaining a steady flow of coal and we are eating into our storage reserves. That situation cannot go on and must be dealt with immediately and decisively. We want suggestions from the industry itself through its manpower committee.

In the construction industry, where a basic revolution in work planning may be called for, we hope the advisory committee will be able to devise methods of planning and operation by which the industry may operate throughout the year on a more steadily maintained basis. The construction industry has always taken it for granted that it is a highly seasonal and fair weather industry. Some of us think that with more hard thinking, the kind of realistic thinking we must all do these days, the construction industry can place itself on a year-around operational basis.

This whole program of curtailment of non-essential industry raises a host of less vital problems which are nevertheless of great concern to the people engaged in each industry itself. For instance: if part of the personnel of a given industry is to be transferred to other work, what about seniority rights? Will they transfer on a leave-of-absence basis? What about wage differentials and group insurance and pension funds where they are moving from an industry in which there is such protection to one in which there is not? If a man is now working on a high weekly hourly wage but only working part-time, would not both he and the nation be better off if he were working full time even at a temporarily reduced hourly rate, if his weekly earnings were maintained or increased? Regarding the question of group insurance in such instances, I may tell you that at our request the insurance companies are at this moment attempting to devise a formula under which the workmen will continue to have protection and I have every reason to believe a satisfactory arrangement can be worked out.

Problems for Unions

This transferring of workers from a curtailed industry to a more essential industry will introduce problems of

union jurisdiction and we must all take a realistic view of the necessities of wartime. A man may move to an industry in which an entirely different union is the dominant organization and if petty legalistic attitudes prevail much wasteful friction can develop.

It seems to me that these are days when we can well afford, not only in the national interest but in our own individual interests, to inject a timely flexibility into our organizations. If we allow anything to detract from our concentration on the one job we have in hand, we are sabotaging our own interests. I would ask all unions to review their conditions of work and other practices to the end that every one may be working full time.

The unions will have to, and are, I believe, making other adjustments in their thinking too. They should reconcile themselves to the large scale employment of women not only in manufacturing industry but in many of the services which have commonly been regarded as suitable only to the employment of men. It involves a change of thinking on the part of management as well, often merely because any change or any disturbance to the long-established order of things is regarded as a nuisance. The simple fact is that thousands of women right now are doing jobs never before done by women in industry. I can tell you that the induction of women into industry is going to be steadily accelerated. So long as the logical and fair principle of equal pay for equal work is observed in industry the older unions and males generally do not need to fear that the employment of women will undermine their wage scales. Women have shown remarkable capacity for adapting themselves and have demonstrated even a superiority over men in many jobs. As management becomes aware of this, it is on its own account encouraging the entry of more women into industry and we in National Selective Service are, of course, endeavouring to stimulate that movement as one of our principal remaining sources of manpower. We are past the stage where we only need in industry women who are working because they need the money. From now on as our armed forces expand and our munitions production grows accordingly, women who never had to work because of economic necessity should come

forward and offer their services to industry in their own and the nation's interest. Not only will we need the single young women but also married women with the exception only of those with considerable family responsibilities.

The introduction of women into plants which have never before employed women obviously necessitates provision of suitable plant facilities exclusively for use by women. The employment of mothers of young children also entails provision for proper day care of their children while the mothers are working. As you know arrangements have been made already by Selective Service with the provinces of Quebec and Ontario for the financing, establishing, and supervising of adequate day care.

The New Regulations

I would now turn briefly to our new set of regulations which came into force on September 1. These regulations provide the first universal control of our nation's manpower. In our planning and in the progressive introduction of various minor regulations since National Selective Service was established last March 23, we have been inevitably moving towards the introduction of the controls now in force.

The new regulations channel all employment through the local offices of National Selective Service. Similarly, and as a corollary, they also channel all help wanted advertising through our offices.

This complete channeling is necessary, first of all, so that we will know where everyone is at any given time. This information is necessary to our basic national manpower planning. Secondly, this channeling gives us the opportunity to guide available manpower into the most essential jobs. In addition to guiding the positive movement of labour this control also enables us to restrain and minimize the movement of labour where desirable in the interests of efficiency.

The new regulations provide, first, that no employer may discharge or lay off any worker and no employee may quit a job without seven days' notice in writing. That

regulation means exactly what it says and it will be enforced.

That seven-day period will serve several purposes. It will help to reduce the number of needless or hot-headed firings or resignations, because any of us will often do on the spur of the moment what he would not do after thinking it over for a week. For that reason the seven-day period should help to reduce the wasteful turnover in labour and the pointless movement from plant to plant. That seven-day period will also give the local selective service officer, who is at once notified of the intended separation, a chance to talk the matter over with the parties concerned.

Employers Must Plan

The seven-day period will also have a vitally important effect in compelling employers to do more long-range planning and to step up the efficiency of their managerial controls. Up to now it has been the practice of employers to adopt the attitude that if there was a lull in either the flow of orders or the flow of raw materials into their plants or if some accident occurred to part of their equipment, they could simply lay off the affected workers, whether it was eight or 800, for a few days until the situation righted itself. I suggest that will have to stop. The employer will no longer be able to give several hundred people notice at 4.45 p.m. that they are through at 5 o'clock for two or three days or until summoned back to the plant.

Admittedly there may be some instances in which the employer himself is not wholly responsible for a shortage of materials, but we are convinced that much more can be done generally to guarantee a continuous flow of materials than has been done in the past. That is why we intend to enforce the seven-day provision. We want the employer to arrange his business so that no man-hours of labour will be lost to the nation in a time of crisis. We don't want the employer merely to pay for idleness. We want him to plan so there will be no idleness. National Selective Service cannot do the employer's planning.

This control of employment operates in three simple stages. First of all when an employer wants to lay off a

man, or an employee wants to quit, three copies of a separation notice are filled out by the employer. One of these is retained by the employer, one is retained by the employee and one is mailed to the nearest employment and selective service office. The employee then may take his separation notice or "quit slip" to the employment office and apply for a permit to seek work while completing his final week. It is illegal for him to seek work without such a permit and it is equally illegal for any employer to interview him regarding a job if he has not such a permit. This permit to seek work may be a blanket permit or it may be limited to certain localities or even to certain industries or occupations.

The third stage consists simply of the employer, who newly engages the applicant, taking up the permit to seek work and returning it to the employment and selective service office to complete the record.

Cannot Tolerate Unemployment

We cannot tolerate anyone continuing to be unemployed and accordingly have provided that anyone who is completely unemployed more than a week or only partially employed for more than two weeks, may be required to take a suitable full time job. Refusal to comply with this regulation will call forth the full penalties provided—which have a maximum of a \$500 fine or 12 months' imprisonment or both.

The new orders do not freeze anyone in his present job. He may quit or be discharged. We have not at present the power to compel anyone to change jobs. But any selective service officer has the authority to call for interview anyone whom he thinks might be more usefully employed. In that interview the officer may attempt to persuade the worker to transfer to a more essential job. Where the worker agrees to such transfer, his seniority and other rights in the job he is leaving will be automatically restored to him on the expiration of the war job. If he is persuaded to take a job at some distance, his transportation will be paid and if he is compelled to maintain himself apart from his family, a reasonable weekly allowance will be made to supplement his regular wage.

As a matter of fact, nothing in any of these new regulations is intended to interfere with the operation of any existing collective bargaining agreement.

A programme of control so completely unprecedented in Canada, or on this continent, may require some common-sense modifications, but there is no intention that there will be softening up in the application of the principles.

I would urge on the people of Canada a reasonably tolerant attitude towards our local offices during these few weeks while they are adjusting themselves to this tremendous new responsibility. These offices are being expanded and their staffs revised and increased as rapidly as possible to meet the needs. Dozens of new offices are being opened. We are also studying how existing union employment offices may be integrated into this new system. We do not wish to do away with any service which can render a useful purpose so long as we can maintain a necessary coordination and control.

The employment office machinery may creak for a while. We decided to put the load on them to quickly discover the weak spots, and we shall make every possible effort to strengthen those spots quickly. We have an order that says every man must work and that we cannot afford to have people unemployed.

It is impossible to have perfection in this objective right from the beginning. For example, while we have unemployed in Winnipeg and labour shortage in Ontario, time is required to explore every possibility of taking work to Winnipeg rather than bring about the dislocation involved in moving thousands of people from Winnipeg to Ontario. We hope within reasonable time to iron out these imperfections. If we don't I am quite sure we will hear about it.

Labour is Consulted

The question is frequently asked as to how much labour is consulted in the drafting and administration of the selective service programme. No regulation which has been introduced since I became Director of National Selective Service has been drafted without obtaining the advice

of the central executives of the major labour and employer organizations of this country.

First of all, every order must be endorsed by the National Selective Service Advisory Board on which sit the entire National War Labour Board, which consists of management and labour representatives. Our local committees, which have just recently been established to advise the manager of each of the major local offices, include one or more representatives of labour. Our advisory committees being set up in various individual industries are composed half of management and half of labour representatives. An increasing number of trade unionists is being gradually added to the strength of the field organization.

We are also setting up manpower boards in all the major communities across this country to assist directly in the administration of the military draft which, the Prime Minister has announced, is being transferred to National Selective Service during the next couple of months. Although plans are not yet complete, it is quite possible some of the personnel of these boards will be drawn from the ranks of labour.

Canada has been setting the pace in a whole series of national controls. Last fall we were the first democracy in history to introduce a comprehensive scheme of control of prices and wages. In March we inaugurated a system of control of civilian employment which has crystalized into the regulations introduced on the first of this month. In all these measures, I say, Canada has been providing leadership. Leadership means responsibility. It means new responsibility and that means new responsibility for you and for me and for everybody else in this country.

I spoke a few minutes ago of the need for a more constructive and less hostile attitude between labour and management. Let me ask you here whether it is not even more possible to improve relations within the ranks of labour itself. Is it not possible to improve relations between the unions making up this congress? Is it not possible to improve relations between this Congress and other major labour groups? All too often has this continent been subject to the spectacle of fratricidal feuds between labour

organizations which might better have been devoting themselves unitedly to better the lot of the common man for whom they presume to speak.

If that is so in times of peace—and it is so—how much more important is it to the very existence of every one of us not only that labour close ranks, but that nothing less than the most complete submergence of self-interest by all Canadians will enable this nation to survive.

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